

METHOD FOR THE SEPARATE AUTHENTICATION OF A TEMPLATE AND USER DATA

5 FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to the secure handling of data and more particularly concerns a method for separately authenticating a template and user data inserted in the template.

10 BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

There are many computer systems that have been designed to create, store, approve, revise or verify data electronically. Many of the documents that have been created through these systems have relied on a pre-existing template as a means of assembling data. This facilitates the means of data entry and allows the user to store the data and the template on one document. The use of the template also contributes to a less time-consuming process of entering information on an electronic document, a process that may contribute to fewer costs than those associated with paper-based data collection.

20 While there exist a great number of systems that may facilitate the creation, serial approval, storage and authentication of documents or of templates, there is no known system to date that can enable users to separate user data from template information. Current systems allow users to create templates and enter data in them. The data therefore becomes 25 bound to the template in a single document. However, such systems do not have the capacity to enable users to securely approve, store and authenticate each portion separately, to approve multiple templates or, alternatively, opt to recreate the complete document.

Existing systems vary in the scope of the functions they can perform. 30 Some are particularly limited, such as U.S. patent no. 4,933,969 to

Marshall et al., which primarily addresses authentication and storage. This mechanism stores information and protects against unauthorized modifications. While this type of data authentication system contributes greatly to ensuring the security and integrity of data, it lacks the capacity 5 for the generation, approval and secure storage of both template information and user data.

Other systems offer certain types of electronic functions that are related to the generation and authentication of electronic signatures. For example, U.S. patent no. 5,195,133 to Kapp et al. describes a system 10 designed to generate a completed payment document, which can be signed by a customer, and then capture that customer's signature in digital form. The principal feature of this mechanism is that it seeks to ensure that a signature approving a particular document was, in fact, captured at the time of the completion of the transaction to which it relates and was not 15 obtained on some other occasion and merely reproduced for the particular transaction in question. The Kapp et al. patent creates a digital record of the transaction and captures a digital representation of the signature at the time the transaction is completed. This system then uses this digital record to encrypt the digital representation of the signature. However, it does not 20 offer any possibility of generating or approving a template document separately from the user data or the electronic approval.

Other technology provides for the creation of an electronic signature for a particular signer only, and cannot be used for any document other than the one for which the signature was given (U.S. patent no. 5,689,567). 25 U.S. patent no. 5,606,609 to Houser and Adler is a system designed to verify the integrity or signer of electronic documents. This is accomplished by embedding and encrypting security information in the electronic document at a location selected by the signer. When the electronic document is subsequently displayed, the technology decrypts the security 30 information and verifies the identity of the signer. In another mechanism,

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another method operates to authenticate and verify users on a network (U.S. patent no. 5,706,427). The possible applications of any of the aforementioned systems, albeit useful for certain purposes, are nonetheless limited as they do not allow for the creation, approval or authentication of 5 template information distinct from the user data.

While each of the aforementioned systems can be useful for electronic business processes, they all have certain deficiencies. These mechanisms lack the capacity to enable the user to generate, approve, store and authenticate template information separately from user data, with the 10 possibility of subsequently merging the two later in a complete document. Current technology operates such that any user data entered on the template becomes bound to the template in one document. The present invention allows users to access either the template data, multiple templates and/or the user data as independent files. Moreover, the technology ensures 15 that no unauthorized modifications can be made to either file or to the complete document. This therefore accords the user greater flexibility in accessing each file without compromising the security or authenticity of the data.

The Remote Template Approval ("RTA") can serve as a vital tool 20 facilitating electronic business processes. Many industries, such as insurance for example, which rely on templates and standard forms as a means of gathering information or selling and marketing services can greatly benefit from this technology. The RTA would enable those marketing these services to securely store and access user data separately from the 25 templates, while individual template information could be generated, accessed or modified for each subsequent user or purchaser. This would represent an efficient way of gathering, storing and authenticating client and template information. In addition, it would offer an easy and secure medium through which users or consumers could submit information and 30 purchase services on-line.

Clearly then, as electronic business transactions become even more prevalent, the need to generate and store template information and user data as separate entities will become more pronounced as well. As this occurs, the need for the Remote Template Approval mechanism will expand with it.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention provides a system and method designed to facilitate remote template approval. This system will enable users to 10 separate user data from template information and authenticate and verify each portion separately. Thus, by virtue of this method, users will be able to approve template information separately from the data added to the template. Preferably, this invention will also enable users to securely recreate the complete document composed of both data and template and 15 verify its authenticity. Such a process would represent a marked improvement over existing systems which enable users to add data to existing templates in such a fashion as to bind the data to the template in one document. The present invention allows the user to securely access the template and the data as distinct records, or to, optionally, access the 20 complete document.

Accordingly, the present invention provides a method for the separate authentication of a template and of user data inserted therein, comprising the steps of:

- a) providing the template, said template having a corresponding template ID and template Document Authentication Code, hereinafter referred to as DAC(t), linked thereto;
- b) inserting the user data in the template;
- c) extracting the user data from the template;
- d) generating a user data Document Authentication Code, hereinafter 30 referred to as DAC(d), based on the user data; and

e) storing the template ID, DAC(t), the user data and DAC(d) in an Approval Data Packet, hereinafter referred to as ADP.

There is also provided a method for the separate authentication of a template having entry fields and user data inserted into said fields, comprising the steps of:

a) selecting a template ID and a corresponding template Document Authentication Code, hereinafter referred to as DAC(t), linked to the template;

b) entering the user data;

10 c) linking the user data to the fields of the template;

d) generating a user data Document Authentication Code, hereinafter referred to as DAC(d), based on the user data; and

e) storing the template ID, DAC(t), the user data and DAC(d) in an Approval Data Packet, hereinafter referred to as ADP.

15 The present invention further provides a method for the separate authentication of a template and of user data inserted therein, comprising the steps of:

a) providing the template, said template having a corresponding template ID and template Document Authentication Code, hereinafter referred to as

20 DAC(t), linked thereto;

b) inserting the user data in the template;

c) generating a complete document Document Authentication Code, hereinafter referred to as DAC(c), based on the template with the user data therein;

25 d) extracting the user data from the template;

e) generating a user data Document Authentication Code, hereinafter referred to as DAC(d), based on the user data; and

f) storing the template ID, DAC(t), the user data, DAC(c) and DAC(d) in an Approval Data Packet, hereinafter referred to as ADP.

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Also provided is a method for the separate authentication of a template and of user data inserted therein by multiple users, comprising the steps of:

a) authenticating a template and user data from a first user according to the

5 last method described above; and

b) for each subsequent user of the multiple users, performing the substeps of:

i) retrieving the template and DAC(c);

ii) inserting user data from previous users in the template;

10 iii) generating for the template with the user data from previous users therein a new complete document Document Authentication Code, hereinafter referred to as DAC(nc);

iv) comparing DAC(nc) with DAC(c), and proceeding only if DAC(nc) is equal to DAC(c);

v) inserting data from the current user in the template;

vi) generating a DAC(c), based on the template with the user data from the previous users and current user therein;

vii) extracting the user data from the previous users and current user from the template;

20 viii) generating a DAC(d), based on the user data extracted in step vii); and

ix) storing the user data, DAC(c) and DAC(d) in ADP.

The present invention can have numerous applications. For example, it could enable users to create and approve one document on one system (e-mail for example), with the target template indicated in the ADP, and send it to another system, which may be the same system or a completely different one. The message can then be entered into the actual template document with all the proper formatting and no need to convert the document.

This invention would be useful for many industries that rely on templates as a means of collecting data. The same template could be generated for each new user and the data collected could be stored separately or could also be combined with the template to create a completed document. This method would allow users to re-generate the template for each subsequent user.

The present invention and its advantages will be better understood upon reading the following non-restrictive description of embodiments thereof with reference to the accompanying drawings.

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BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 is a flow chart representing the main steps of a method for the separate authentication of a template and of user data inserted therein in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

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FIG. 2 is a flow chart detailing step f of the method of FIG. 1.

FIG. 3 is a flow chart representing the main steps of a method for the separate authentication of a template and of user data inserted therein in accordance with an alternative embodiment of the invention.

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FIG. 4 is a flow chart representing the main steps of a method for the separate authentication of a template and of user data inserted therein in accordance with another embodiment of the invention.

FIG. 5 is a flow chart detailing step g of the method of FIG. 4.

FIG. 6 is a flow chart detailing another variant for step g of the method of FIG. 4.

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FIG. 7 is a flow chart representing the main steps of a method for the separate authentication of a template and of user data inserted therein in accordance with yet another embodiment of the invention.

DESCRIPTION OF PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS OF THE INVENTION

Referring to FIGs. 1 and 2, the steps of a method for the separate authentication of a template and user data inserted in the template are shown. This method allows the secure handling of the template and user data independently, without having to store the user data inside the template.

The first step a) of the method of FIG. 1 consists of providing the template itself. A template ID, identifying the particular template chosen and a template Document Authentication code, DAC(t), are both linked to the template. DAC(t) is a code characterizing precisely the template's content, and is preferably generated through a one-way hash function. If the template is not pre-existing, step a) may include the substep of generating the template, creating the template ID and DAC(t) and storing the last two in an appropriate location, which can for example be inside the template itself or in a linked storage system.

The second step b) consists of inserting the user data in the template. The term "user data" is understood as encompassing any relevant information that may be entered in a template, including a user signature and the date of signing. The method may therefore be used in the context of the remote approval of a document. The template preferably has specific fields where the user data may be received.

The user data is then extracted from the template in accordance with step c), and in the next step d) a user data Authentication Code (DAC(c)) is generated, based on the user data itself independently of the template.

Step e) consists of storing the template ID, DAC(t), the user data and DAC(c) in an Approval Data Packet (ADP) which may be encrypted for security. The user data may alternatively be stored elsewhere and a link to its location may be provided in the ADP.

Referring to FIGS. 1 and 2, there is shown an optional step f) of reconstructing a complete document including both the template and the

user data. In accordance with this additional step, the template ID and DAC(t) are first retrieved from the ADP, and the template corresponding to the template ID is accessed and opened. A new DAC (DAC(nt)) is generated on the opened template, and compared to DAC(t). Corrective action is to be 5 taken if they don't match. If they do match, the user data and DAC(d) are also retrieved. A DAC(nd) is generated on the user data and compared to DAC(d). If they also match, the user data may then be inserted in the template.

In an alternate embodiment of the invention, illustrated in FIG. 3, the 10 method described above may be performed without actually accessing the template. In this embodiment, a template ID and the corresponding DAC(t) are selected, and the user data is entered, preferably in answer to prompts for particular information. The user data entered is then linked to corresponding fields in the template, so that a complete document including 15 both the template and the user data may later be reconstructed.

Referring to FIGs. 4, 5 and 6, there is shown yet another embodiment of the invention. In this particular embodiment, a step is added between steps b) and c) of FIG. 1 where a DAC(c) is generated based on the template with the user data therein, before the user data is extracted from 20 the template. This DAC(c) is stored in the ADP with the other relevant information. In this manner, when reconstructing the complete document, additional substeps of generating a DAC(nc) on the complete document once the user data is inserted in the template and comparing this DAC(nc) with DAC(c) may be performed, as shown in FIG. 5. Alternatively, only the 25 DACs of the complete documents may be compared, completely bypassing the verifications of the separate template and user data, as illustrated in FIG. 6.

Referring to FIG. 7, there is shown another embodiment of the invention where multiple users insert user data sequentially in a single 30 template. The method includes the steps of:

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a) authenticating a template and user data from a first user according to the method of FIG. 4. In this manner, an ADP is created containing the template ID, DAC(t), the user data, DAC(d) and DAC(c).

5 b) for each subsequent user of the multiple users, the following substeps are performed:

i) retrieving the template and DAC(c) from the ADP;

10 ii) inserting user data from previous users in the template. The document thereby generated corresponds to the complete document of the previous iteration;

15 iii) generating for the template with the user data from previous users therein a new complete document Document Authentication Code (DAC(nc));

iv) comparing DAC(nc) with DAC(c), and proceeding only if DAC(nc) is equal to DAC(c);

15 v) inserting data from the current user in the template;

vi) generating a DAC(c), based on the template with the user data from the previous users and current user therein;

vii) extracting the user data from the previous users and current user from the template;

20 viii) generating a DAC(d), based on the user data extracted in step vii); and

ix) storing the user data, DAC(c) and DAC(d) in ADP. DAC(c) and DAC(d) thereby replace the previously stored values of these variables.

25 An additional step of reconstructing the complete document, which in this case corresponds to the document generated in the last iteration of step b), may also be performed, either in the manner illustrated in FIG. 5 or FIG. 6.

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Of course, numerous changes could be made to the preferred embodiment disclosed hereinabove without departing from the scope of the invention as defined in the appended claims.